

Introduction

The United States Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Office of Research and Development is the official government agency responsible for the implementation of the International Technical Conferences on the Enhanced Safety of Vehicles (ESV). The Conferences are held approximately every two years and hosted by participating Governments. Delegate and attendee participation includes worldwide governments, automotive industries, motor vehicle research engineers and scientists, medical, insurance, and legal professions, consumers, academia, private corporations, and international media.

The ESV Program originated in 1968 under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society, and was implemented through bilateral agreements between the governments of the United States, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Sweden. The participating nations agreed to develop experimental safety vehicles to advance the state-of-the-art technology in automotive engineering and to meet periodically to exchange information on their progress. Since its inception the number of international partners has grown to include the governments of Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, and two international organizations -- the European Enhanced Vehicle-Safety Committee, and the European Commission. A representative from each country and organization serves as a Government Focal Point in support of the Conference.

In 1968 the Conference was known as the International Experimental Safety of Vehicles Conference. Over time, the focus of the Conference shifted from concentration on the development of experimental safety vehicles to broader issues of safety and international cooperation seeking reductions in motor vehicle fatalities and injuries. These issues include program advances such as Pedestrian Safety, Frontal and Side Impact Protection, Biomechanics, Intelligent Transportation Systems, and Vehicle Compatibility. In 1991, the participating governments agreed to change the name of the Conference to "The International Technical Conference on the Enhanced Safety of Vehicles" to reflect the current focus. The 14th ESV Conference, held in Munich, Germany, May, 1994, was the first conference in which the new name was used, and "25 Years of ESV Development" was celebrated.

The 15th ESV Conference, held in Melbourne, Australia, May, 1996, was precedence-setting as well. A new 5-year priority research program known as International Harmonized Research Activities (IHRA) was established under the auspices of the ESV Conference. The program established six international priority research areas; Biomechanics, Advanced Offset Frontal Crash Protection, Vehicle Compatibility, Pedestrian Safety, Intelligent Transportation Systems and recently chosen Side Impact Protection. In May of 1997, NHTSA hosted a Public Workshop to share with its partners the goals and objectives of IHRA. In November of 1997, the ESV Government Focal Points agreed that all participating governments would join in these priority research programs, and that the programs would be governed by an IHRA Steering Committee comprised mainly of the ESV Government Focal Points. Six Working Groups that now exist in each of the priority research areas are led by participating Governments, and are comprised of government and industry experts. The IHRA Steering Committee consisting of Government members meets biannually to review recommendations and research plans being developed by the Working Groups.

This, the 16th ESV Conference hosted by Transport Canada, held in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, May 31-June 4, 1998, was attended by delegates from twenty one (21) different countries. The IHRA Status Reports on the progress of the five priority research areas were presented during this Conference. Well over 300 technical papers were accepted for inclusion in the Conference Proceedings, with international authors representative of sixteen (16) different nations. This Conference also marked the first time scientific poster presentations were given.

The 17th ESV Conference, the first Conference of the 21st Century, will be held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, in the year 2001. The year was chosen because IHRA will have met the 5-year deadline for reporting their vision, goals, objectives, and achievements under the program.

We thank our international conference participants for their continued interest, dedication and support. It is an outstanding example of the highest regard for automotive safety research we are certain will continue.